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GREGORY NATURAL BRIDGE & LA GORCE ARCH

ESCALANTE RIVER LANDSCAPES AND HISTORY

by

Jared Randall Farmer

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

HISTORY

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

1994/6

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UNDISCOVERED TO UNDISCOVERABLE: GREGORY NATURAL BRIDGE

Among abundant natural splendor, the canyons of the lower Escalante River enclose immense arches and bridges. Secluded in a jungle of slickrock, these natural spans attracted minimal attention until mid-century. Not until 1940 was Gregory Natural Bridge officially—if not genuinely—discovered. The “discoverer” was Norman Nevills, one of the most prominent and most colorful early commercial river runners in the West. Like Glen Canyon, Nevills’ staple run, much of the bygone wilderness of the lower Escalante River now lies beneath Lake Powell. Gregory Natural Bridge was submerged by the filling reservoir, easily the largest span lost that way. Its present invisibility belies its past record of human association—with not only Nevills, but also surveyors, ranchers, and sundry travelers.

Natural bridges, unlike arches, form by stream erosion. Gregory Natural Bridge was not a misnomer. Fiftymile Creek, a tributary of the Escalante, had gnawed through the neck of an incised meander, thereby deserting (for an interval) a rambling path for a direct one. The resulting hole grew to measure approximately 175 feet wide and 75 feet high, dimensions which had room for increase; Gregory Natural Bridge’s total height, from cobble streambed to ruddy Navajo sandstone roadway, extended about 200 feet.¹ A striped patina of desert varnish graced the massive formation. Cottonwoods formed a trembling border of green. Natural bridges are themselves uncommon, even in the Colorado Plateau, but beautiful Gregory, considering the arid setting, was a rarity: the rock canopy spanned a perennial flow of water.

Gregory Natural Bridge was known before 1940, albeit without a name. Native Americans, both ancient and modern, undoubtedly visited the place; Mormon stockmen from

Escalante and Boulder occasionally camped there, leaving tin cans behind. A U.S. Geological Survey mapping crew noted the span in 1921, but the working men lacked any inclination to "discover" the formation. It took Norman Nevills to playact the explorer, a role he happily filled.

Hailing from the Bay area of California, Norman Davies Nevills immigrated to minuscule Mexican Hat, Utah on the San Juan River in 1928. He was twenty. His father, an itinerant prospector, had arrived several years earlier. Barely educated beyond high school and trained in no particular field, Nevills labored with his father in the San Juan oil field and did odd jobs for the U.S.G.S. Although the boom that brought them busted, the Nevills—Norman and his parents—remained in Utah. The red rock landscape had grown on them. "Having faith in the eventual development of the roads that would open up this region," they built the Mexican Hat Lodge, out of which the younger Nevills operated his subsequent guide business.² With ambition and incredible energy (and the invaluable assistance of his wife, Doris) he transformed river running from a pastime into a vocation. Success came slowly, but before his untimely death in a 1949 plane crash, Norman Nevills had been dubbed the "world's No. 1 fast-water man."³

To attract paying guests and make a living at the nascent business of recreational rafting, Nevills needed publicity. Theatrical by nature, he also craved recognition. In 1938, Nevills led his first major excursion, an event-filled passage down the Green and Colorado rivers from Green River, Utah, to Lake Mead. Because of the deadly reputation of the Colorado River and the presence of two women in the party, the trip made news around the country. "They'll never make it," one "veteran" river explorer grimly forecasted. While "Nevills Expedition 1938" did experience its share of clashes—both with rocks and personalities—everyone emerged from the canyons intact, and Nevills enjoyed the moment of fame.

Publicity did not immediately translate into prosperity, however. 1939 was disappointing. "Our financial status here this summer has been nil," Nevills wrote. "The lack of trips has made this the worst year we have ever experienced."⁴ He received a boost when syndicated columnist Ernie Pyle, touring across America, took a short boat ride on the San Juan River; but Nevills needed a successful trip in 1940 to keep his career on track. He wanted to "hit the front pages again," Pyle noted.⁵ How? To Nevills, the great media interest in 1938 indicated the "'law of escape,' whereby the general public gives vent to its suppressed desire to share in great adventures [and] is highly aroused."⁶ For 1940, he hoped to take full advantage of this perceived popular appetite by arranging publicity in advance.

Nevills envisioned a trip that would "dwarf" his earlier activities "in all details of interest, hazard, and accomplishment." In 1938, his expedition had included the first women to float the full length of the Colorado River in Grand Canyon. Nevills would outdo that by transporting women (including his wife) all the way from Green River, Wyoming to Lake Mead—a retracing of John Wesley Powell's famous exploration. Members of the 1938 expedition collected plant specimens; that would be followed up by a "complete botanical survey" of the river corridor. The 1940 party, to be composed of "various scientists and experts," would also plot cliff dwellings and gather geological and mineralogical data. At the close of each busy day, they would relate their observations and adventures to a national audience via a radio carried in the boats. The listeners would "[run] rapids as they sit in their apartment or drive down Fifth Ave...". "Even the technical problems of the broadcast," Nevills alleged, "will arouse universal interest."⁷

That was not all. In a moment of romance, Nevills planned to take an accordionist down

Glen Canyon; the group would "drift by moonlight with the music."⁸ Cameramen, some of "international fame," would capture the entire canyon system in natural color.⁹ The photographs would illustrate presentations on a nationwide lecture tour. Fox, Paramount, and Movietone had, ostensibly, each made tentative offers to produce the expedition's movie film results. Nevills wrote of receiving additional funds from a major sponsor such as National Carbon or Camels. Much more than a recreational trip, the planned *expedition* would "pursue scientific and photographic research."¹⁰ Instead of yielding immediate profit, it would "pave the way" for future ventures. In short, Nevills dreamed up a giant promotional stunt.¹¹

Nevills eagerly outlined bits of this scheme in letters to prospective passengers. Into his salesman's pitch, written in characteristic unpolished English, a tantalizing report of a colossal natural bridge hardly seemed out of place:

And now, here's where the rabbit comes out of the hat! ----I have definite, exact data on the location of a new , undiscovered natural bridge. ----A bridge that makes the "Rainbow [Bridge] look like a culvert"-----Alright, alright, I know this sounds fantastic, but here's the dope: A good many years ago a certain man, now dead, saw this "undiscovered bridge". Directly afterwards he saw the Rainbow and then made the comparison quoted above. For reasons of animosity towards his party and other reasons he didnot divulge the bridges existence untill a year or so ago before his death. The man he told, a great friend of mine, and realizing his likely lack of opportunity in ever seeing this bridge gave me the dope this Fall to use as I see fit.-----From the location he gave me I immediately sp[o]tted the bridge on an airshot--and scaling showed it to be 1260 feet across the top! Its a gigantic affair. Easier to reach from the river than Rainbow is the capping climax.. If I had'nt seen the airshot I might have been sceptical. The park service are all hipped up and I've already arranged to inform them in Washington by wire. ---So thats that! I have confirmed the location, know it is 1260' across the top---all we need is to see the hole. That we have to take this mans word for as to its size.¹²

There was good reason why the story sounded fantastic: Nevills made most of it up. How he actually learned about the natural bridge is not uninteresting, but certainly more prosaic.

The initial news came from Thorn Mayes. Mayes was an engineer from California who liked to vacation in Monument Valley with his pocket Brunton. In 1933, he headed the mapping unit of the privately financed Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition, with Nevills as one of his field assistants. In subsequent summers, Mayes would stop by the Mexican Hat Lodge to visit. On one such call, in 1939, Mayes informed Nevills that Herbert Gregory, a government geologist, had told him about a natural bridge in a tributary of the Escalante River. Mayes and Nevills consulted a Fairchild Survey aerial photograph of the region which corroborated the intelligence. Nevills, already planning the 1940 trip, saw the span as "another major objective."¹³

Mayes learned of the bridge from Gregory; Gregory received the knowledge from another U.S.G.S. employee, William Chenoweth. A topographic engineer, Chenoweth supervised a 1921 damsite survey from Green River, Utah to Lee's Ferry. He and four others stayed behind in Glen Canyon to chart major tributaries to 3900 feet, the full pool level of a proposed reservoir (which in another form became Lake Powell). Chenoweth's assigned section of Glen Canyon encompassed the Escalante River. In the course of work, his small group hiked up Fiftymile Creek, saw the unnamed Gregory Natural Bridge, and camped beneath it one night. Rodman Leigh Lint made a record in the visitor register at Rainbow Bridge, where they visited a few days afterwards:

Near, the Escalante River-8 1/2 miles from the Colorado River, and 3/4 miles up "40 Mile Creek" on the south side of the Escalante is a natural bridge 75 feet high, with a span of 100 feet. This bridge is across the creek and forms a perfect bridge and not an arch.¹⁴

Months later, Herbert Gregory got wind of the natural bridge and requested information from Chenoweth. Gregory was preparing a report on the region around the Kaiparowits Plateau and Escalante River. Chenoweth sent a description of the bridge which the geologist utilized. Somewhere along the way, though, the span length doubled in size:

On Fortymile Creek a beautiful natural bridge has resulted from the undercutting of a meander spur and has the history of the well-known Rainbow Bridge in the Navajo Country. As estimated by W.R. Chenoweth of the United States Geological Survey, the Fortymile Bridge has a span of 200 feet and a height from stream bed to roadway of 75 feet.¹⁵

Hugh Miser, another government geologist, published a 1924 report on the San Juan River canyon which indirectly noted the bridge. The geologic map which accompanied the report showed the span's approximate location (mislocated in unmarked Clear Creek), labeled "Natural Bridge."¹⁶ Miser had heard about the formation from his colleague William Chenoweth.

Nevills had several opportunities to leaf through the Rainbow Bridge register and therefore could have seen Leigh Lint's entry. Before 1939, Nevills apparently had not looked at Herbert Gregory's work, but the river runner had "poured over and over" Miser's San Juan River paper.¹⁷ In other words, he may have possessed an inkling of the bridge's existence, but did not become intrigued until Thorn Mayes' visit.

In Nevills' garbled account, a fictional member of Chenoweth's survey party was the dead man who had seen the bridge. The "great friend" (also a "man prominent in national affairs") who heard the surveyman's secret—imparted on a deathbed in one version—was presumably Gregory or Mayes. The story, in the words of a Nevills' boatman, contained "just enough

substance to make it interesting and slightly probable."¹⁸ With it, Nevills hoped to entice paying guests. "Need sever[a]ll more [passengers] and must turn everything over to get 'em," he once disclosed. As one inducement, he invited people to help officially discover and name the colossal natural bridge.¹⁹

The self-interest which prompted Nevills to plug the bridge subsumed a more praiseworthy motive. Judging from his career and the spirited writings he left behind, Nevills clearly held Utah's canyonlands dear. As he put it, "I love this country, and want to do all in my power [to] help it progress."²⁰ In his eyes, that meant supporting Escalante National Monument.

In the latter 1930s, the Interior Department under the expansion-minded leadership of Harold Ickes suggested that a huge reserve (nearly 7000 square miles in the original proposal) be created along the Colorado River in southern Utah—the heart of the largest undeveloped district in the United States at that time. The Southwest regional office of the National Park Service asked Nevills to compose a descriptive article about territory very few knew, which he called home. At times Nevills sounded like a conservationist:

This is the canyon wonderland - a huge roadless area that is superbly beautiful. It is almost entirely publicly-owned. The public, though, is deriving scarcely any benefit, for only a very few people have been there. Roads are needed to make it accessible, just as roads had to be provided before the Grand Canyon could be "opened." People from throughout the world - several millions of them - have gained inspiration and education from viewing the Grand Canyon. The same will be true of the Escalante region, after accessibility is provided. Roads will come when the area is linked into the National Park System, as it should be, to prevent commercialization and to assure its preservation in a natural state. It should be kept unspoiled and it should be made available to all the people.²¹

It was in this publicly-owned Shangri-la that Nevills uncovered the natural bridge. Writing a travelogue for the Park Service following the 1940 expedition, Nevills predicted that thousands would visit the breath-taking Escalante River canyon, part of "an area that someday will be the 'Playground of America.'"²² Charles Kelly (another nonnative Utahn) wrote in *Desert Magazine* that the discovery of Gregory Natural Bridge "focuses attention on a comparatively unexplored section of the West which may soon be made accessible to desert travelers."²³ Unfortunately, Nevills (or the limited audience of *Desert Magazine*) lacked both the influence and the opportunity to boost Escalante National Monument effectively. By 1940, the proposal was irreversibly moribund, a casualty of political wrangling between state and federal government.²⁴

Nevills had hoped to provide Escalante National Monument "a big impetus" by "'selling' this country thru the lectures" that were to follow the 1940 trip.²⁵ Of course, whenever the river runner sold the canyon scenery, he simultaneously advertised himself. He could have expected increased business (and renown) with the realization of the monument. Potential profit overlapped love for the land; together, they help explain why Nevills' statements about a "new" bridge within the proposed monument boundaries were so enthusiastic. Recounting his 1938 Grand Canyon run before the Women's Literary Club of Moab, Nevills could not refrain from saying he expected to bring to light "another arch or natural bridge similar to but larger" than world-famous Rainbow Bridge. He told the *Salt Lake Tribune* the same thing.²⁶

Nevills professed to be the lone possessor of the directions to the bridge (sometimes in the form of a map) and gave that knowledge an air of secrecy. He gladly notified others of his imminent find, but refused to reveal its location, as Charles Madsen, state director of the W.P.A.

Utah Writer's Project, found out. Madsen wrote Nevills:

...I understand that you plan to "discover" a new natural bridge on your next trip. I have heard that it's going to be three times as large as the Rainbow. Apparently you have already discovered the bridge and are merely awaiting a more auspicious time to make your announcement. However, we would like to have some information about this bridge in our state guide which is to be published about August. If you are willing to give us this information, we will treat it in the strictest confidence and promise you that nothing will leak out about it until the book appears, by which time you will doubtless already have announced your discovery.

Nevills answered curtly:

Am very sorry, but am maintaining a strict policy of not disclosing any information whatsoever as to the whereabouts of the new bridge, suffice to say it is in Utah.²⁷

Confidentiality showed elsewhere. A mimeographed brochure for Nevills 1940 trip contained a crude, hand-drawn map of the Green and Colorado rivers and surrounding country, including the Escalante River. X marked the spot—"New Bridge"—but X was placed on the wrong side of Glen Canyon.²⁸

How might Nevills have justified discovering a known feature? The answer is obvious. No picture had been printed; only one description had been published—a small paragraph buried within a geologic paper; nobody had given a name to the span; no person seemed to have visited the place in nearly twenty years. Since no one *claimed* discovery, the reasoning goes, how could the bridge have really been discovered?

Resisting the "awfull tem[p]tation" to "sneak off and have a preview," Nevills prepared for the June launching of his 1940 expedition.²⁹ Five weeks after a royal sendoff by the town of Green River, Wyoming, Nevills' trio of brightly-painted plywood boats landed at the mouth of the Escalante River. Following lunch, six from the party began the hike to the bridge. The thermometer read one-hundred degrees. Doris Nevills, boatman Del Reed, and a disappointed Barry Goldwater (before his years as a politician) stayed behind with a sore leg, arm, and knee, respectively.

Walking and wading past "tapestry walls and refreshingly cool springs," the group arrived at Fiftymile Creek after six hours. They ate a frugal supper before rolling out on the sand. Hiking resumed early in the morning. Only twenty minutes after entering the side canyon, Mildred Baker recorded, they were "walking along, looking down to watch our footing, when we glanced up and found we were directly under the Bridge."³⁰

Comparisons to Rainbow Bridge were inevitable. "We found it a most impressively beautiful bridge," Baker confided in her journal, but it "could not compare with [Rainbow Bridge's] spiritual grace." Commenting in retrospect, John Southworth, a mining engineer from California, reserved even slightest praise:

...I was wholly unimpressed by the bridge. Maybe the arch was 40 or 50' in the clear and the top was 70 more than that. Wasn't much anyhow - and surely wasn't a delicate or impressive formation like Rainbow. ... Saw lots of tin cans from cow camps. And lots of signs of cows. Frankly, the whole thing bored me after I nearly walked under it without seeing it. The walk must have tired me unduly. Also, the "mighty discoverer" in Norm might have built me up to where the letdown was just too, too much.³¹

If Nevills experienced any letdown, he suppressed it. "It would be hard to describe the wonder and thrill that we felt," he wrote later. "As we gazed at [the bridge], its enormity began to be appreciated and we soon realized that here was no ordinary natural bridge... This bridge was huge."³²

The objectives of the expedition had included measuring the bridge. It is puzzling, then, that Nevills came so poorly equipped for the job. His tools consisted of a small metal ruler, and two new spools of heavy cotton thread—each supposed to be 300 feet long—he borrowed from Mildred Baker. Jesse Nusbaum of the Park Service had ineffectually advised Nevills to "take tapes for accurate measurements" to avoid any controversy about the true size of the bridge.³³

Nevills and Hugh Cutler, a pair of practiced climbers, scrambled to the bridge's roadway, where Nevills made a plum line. He unwound one spool completely and used 5½ feet of the other to reach the canyon floor. To determine the total height, he simply measured the used portion of the second thread and added that to 300 feet. Nevills gauged an inside opening of 192 feet and a span of 293½ feet.

These dimensions, though modest next to the pre-trip publicity, deviated significantly from reality.³⁴ Nevills nonetheless entered the numbers like facts in the back pages of his wife's diary, and on his river map, accompanied by a sketch of the bridge. Above it he inscribed:

1 mile from mouth

discovered:

7:30 A.M. 7-26-40

Named:

*Gregory Bridge*³⁵

Nevills had desired to christen it the Doris Mae—after his wife (Doris) and mother (Mae)—but the others at the bridge "hooted him down."³⁶ When one from the group advanced the name Gregory, Nevills emphatically rejected it, according to Mildred Baker. Commenting how peaceful it felt in the shade of the natural canopy, Baker proposed Hozhoni—a Navajo word she misinterpreted literally as "peace." Nevills, who spoke a little of the language, did not recognize the word; he convinced her that *nizhoni* ("beautiful") was what she had in mind.

Nevills returned to the boats saying he had named the span "Nijoni," Barry Goldwater wrote, "but we insist upon calling it Gregory in honor of Dr. Herbert Gregory and Norm says he will send in the name."³⁷ Nevills later controverted Goldwater, insisting he had written *Gregory Bridge* on a piece of paper which he placed inside an old tin (Delmonte's plum jam) the group found nestled in a cairn. Whatever the case, upon reaching Lee's Ferry, where a reporter waited, Nevills informed, "We named the bridge after Herbert E. Gregory, widely-known government geologist... It was Gregory who furnished us with the information which made our discovery possible." Nevills made it known that the bridge had been measured with "steel tapes." (Later they would become "silk lines.") "There is no question as to the accuracy of our measurements," he boasted to the interviewer, "nor that the arch is the second highest yet known."³⁸

Some passengers assumed the measurements' accuracy. Those who doubted might aggrandize the bridge anyway. John Southworth, who privately recalled his boredom at an estimated 120 foot high span, earlier reported to his alumni magazine that the bridge "turned out to be of exceptional size ... rising 307 feet above the canyon floor." He cited the mock

discovery second only to the 1776 fording of the Colorado River by the Dominguez-Escalante expedition to illustrate that Glen Canyon was indeed "a canyon of history."³⁹ Charles Larabee communicated in a 1948 letter that he very much doubted the bridge was anywhere near 305 feet high and 293 feet wide, and added, "It is not a beautiful bridge." Just the month before he was printed as saying, "...We discovered a natural bridge," the "second largest natural bridge in the world," one of "nature's masterpieces."⁴⁰

Writers not connected with Nevills could not be faulted for rebroadcasting hyperbole about the bridge. One later expressed, "If anyone is embarrassed ... it should be Norm, not me. He claimed to have discovered it and it's down in black and white in several books and magazines."⁴¹ But Nevills did not embarrass easily; he never explicitly revoked his claim of discovery. Only reluctantly did he concede the bridge's real size.

In June 1945, Nevills conducted a river trip from Moab to Lee's Ferry which included a return visit to Gregory Natural Bridge. One of his boatmen was Otis Marston, future undisputed expert on Colorado River history trivia. Nearly 200 river miles from embarkation, the group pulled in at the mouth of the Escalante. Nevills, Marston, and two others waded upstream and camped at Fiftymile Creek. When an thunderstorm rolled by in the night, the group hurriedly moved by flashlight to the shelter of the bridge. Morning conversation turned contentious as the men conjectured about the true dimensions of the canopy above them. Disgusted, Marston measured the bridge himself using a tape measure and trigonometry. His results were on target: a span of 181 feet, an inside height of 75 feet, and a total height of 200 feet.⁴² According to Marston, Nevills discouraged coming to the bridge in the first place and acted nervous while there.

P. T. Reilly, a former Nevills boatman, has shed light on the episode:

As soon as [Nevills] found out I had been a surveyor for the U.S. General Land Office, he described how [Marston] had tried to tell him he could measure the height of Gregory Bridge by using a 6-foot yoyo tape and a 30-foot piece of string. He asked, "Don't you think he was trying to pull my leg?" He was clearly crestfallen when I assured him that anyone could make a fairly accurate measurement with those tools. ... [Nevills'] knowledge in math consisted only of the four basic functions.⁴³

No more could Nevills describe Gregory Natural Bridge as "long as a city block and high enough to arch over a cathedral!"⁴⁴ When admitting his error, he would sometimes try to save face by painting himself as a bumbler: "...We had measured from wrong end of silk line at time of checking!"⁴⁵ Again, Nevills freely embellished the truth.

As Ernie Pyle noticed from only brief company, Norman Nevills had "a little touch of exaggeration about his conversation that adds awe and flavor for the tourist."⁴⁶ Naturally, storytelling is expected of river guides past and present, but Nevills overstepped the prerogative when he spread his stories publicly. Even so, the exuberant exaggerations about Gregory Natural Bridge seem fairly innocuous in retrospect. Certainly they did not add up to the nefarious "fraud" Otis Marston depicted in numerous letters to fellow Colorado River river rats. A one-time employee and friend of Nevills, Marston became a bitter enemy. Nevills worked to build his legacy up; in the name of historical accuracy, influential Marston worked to cut it down, particularly after Nevills' death. Both men sometimes exploited the inspiring sandstone bridge for uninspiring designs.

Gregory Natural Bridge occasionally aroused irrational competitiveness in people—cases

of what Marston called *firstitus*. Herbert Gregory, writing Nevills to acknowledge the "generous decision to name the big bridge after me," made it known that while William Chenoweth "deserves full credit for the location and description," he himself had seen the span earlier during fieldwork in 1918. However, Gregory's field books of that year make no mention of it.⁴⁷ He did not, in fact, view the bridge with his name until 1944. Trying to elicit a restatement of the 1918 claim, Marston queried Gregory at least twice. The geologist left the letters unanswered.

Charles Kelly, author, historian, and first Capitol Reef National Monument custodian, tramped around Glen Canyon in the 1930s. When later interviewed by Marston, Kelly stated that he visited Gregory Natural Bridge around 1938.⁴⁸ That is highly doubtful considering a letter penned in 1940:

I only wish we had discovered it; but there are undoubtedly others yet to be found. It had definitely been named "Gregory Bridge" and quite rightly so. Nevills is a cocky brat, but I give him credit for that.⁴⁹

Firstitus did not infect everyone associated with the bridge, of course. The last thing on William Chenoweth's mind had been discovery; he and his men had a schedule to keep. "The Escalante required 30 miles of stream traverse and a back packing job. We usually were a tired bunch and when we hit something like the bridge, our enthusiasm was not at high pitch..."⁵⁰ Harry Tasker, employed in 1921 as a rodman, portrayed the difficult working conditions pithily: "The coyotes had nothing on us."⁵¹ Hefting packs full of surveying equipment and little else, the men were disinclined to savor the scenery. A tongue-in-cheek couplet described both Tasker's job and the mindset it demanded:

Some come here to See the work of God

*But I come here to hold up a rod!*⁵²

In later years, most bridge visitors arrived unburdened by obligations of work. Remote Gregory Natural Bridge never became a celebrated tourist attraction; however, with time, growing numbers of people made their way to Fiftymile Creek—a trend both hastened and cut short by Glen Canyon Dam.

In 1963, Glen Canyon of the Colorado River began its abrupt transformation into stagnant Lake Powell. Two decades before, in 1941, Weldon Heald declared, "Glen Canyon cuts through the last remaining region in the United States where geographical discoveries are still being made."⁵³ To back that assertion, he used the erroneous example of Gregory Natural Bridge. But if the canyon country was instead the last region where geographical *rediscoveries* were possible, the point remained essentially the same. Pre-dam Glen Canyon was wild. Not untouched wilderness, not The Place No One Knew, but a wild place nonetheless—a "most formidable and appalling barrier" to those "accustomed to motoring at will over improved highways..."⁵⁴ Correspondingly: though Gregory Natural Bridge was the *best-known* Escalante River span in the 1950s, three separate years passed by that decade when no one signed the visitor register there.⁵⁵

River runner Harry Aleson planted an encased notebook beneath the bridge in May 1949. He and Louise Fetzner had arrived at Fiftymile Creek by floating—often dragging—inflatable rafts down the shallow Escalante River. The register remained in place until October 1963, when wilderness guide Ken Sleight removed it in timely fashion. The penstocks at Glen Canyon Dam had closed that January; by April, dead water had backed up the Escalante. Of some 450 visits

recorded in the register, 410 occurred after 1956, the year of the dam's authorization, when visiting Glen Canyon began to take on urgency. On seventeen trips in 1963, Ken Sleight guided 123 persons to Gregory Natural Bridge. His patrons probably comprised close to one-quarter of those who ever saw the span before flooding. Sleight called the lower Escalante River the "most beautiful canyon I have ever known."⁵⁶

Geography professor Stephen Jett made a "requiem pilgrimage" with a Sleight party in April 1963. Despite bad weather and frigid river water, he was enthralled by the Escalante canyon system and by Gregory Natural Bridge:

...This massive bridge is, incredibly, eclipsed by the magnificence of its setting. Great cliffs enclosing unbelievably constricted and contorted canyons, strange, twisted rock formations, and great caves and alcoves strain one's credulity. But all this grandeur and beauty was slightly tarnished by the depressing thought that Gregory and most of its surroundings will soon be sacrificed on the altar of the great god "Reclamation."⁵⁷

Jett's backpacking companions included husband-wife owners of a ranch shop in Flagstaff, a retired chemist from Los Angeles, a researcher from Los Alamos, and a housewife from Brigham City. Diversity was not the exception among bridge visitors. Twenty-one states and one foreign country (Italy) were represented in the register. Different people came for different reasons: vacation, adventure, scouting (a group from Salt Lake City contained no less than 84 Explorers), research, photography. Or for no particular reason. As Verden Lee Bettilyon recorded, "They told me it was hear [sic] so I came up and signed it." Several people, including a family from Chicago, made multiple trips to the bridge. Register entries such as "Beautiful

country — too bad this arch must be covered with water" showed that Jett had sympathizers, but epitaphs for Gregory Natural Bridge were isolated.

Local denizens have left very few written impressions about the natural bridge or the landscape in general. In the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers' history of Escalante, Edson Alvey noted, "In the lower Soda Gulch, near its junction with the Escalante River, a beautiful stream of water flows underneath the majestic Gregory Natural Bridge."⁵⁸ Rancher Clark Veater matter-of-factly commented about the surrounding slickrock landscape:

...In reply to your inquiries About Natural Bridges and scenery for montion [*sic*] Pictures, We have several different kinds of bridges, Gultches, Caves, and Canyons, And as I stated before, I am sure they could be used to any ones advantage that is any way interested in that type of scenery.⁵⁹

Norman Nevills believed millions would be interested in Utah's "canyon wonderland." He wanted to make Gregory Natural Bridge "accessible to the lovers of worthwhile scenery."⁶⁰ Lake Powell, its promoters would have said, did just that. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation commissioner Floyd Dominy issued an open invitation: miraculous Lake Powell was "Yours to Discover." Those words, the title of a magazine article extolling the recreation planning which preceded the reservoir, ironically appeared atop a picture of Gregory Natural Bridge.⁶¹ Lake Powell made the span easily discoverable for the many; unfortunately, the accessibility was short-lived. A newspaper travel article about Lake Powell headlined "Rising Waters Open Vistas" reminded that rising waters reciprocally close vistas. The caption to an accompanying photograph of a boat beneath the bridge read "GREGORY ARCH WILL BE COMPLETELY COVERED WHEN THE LAKE IS FILLED."⁶²

Many more people saw Gregory Natural Bridge by boat in the few years following the creation of Lake Powell than had ever seen it on foot or horse. Canyon Tours, Inc., the first Lake Powell concessionaire, advertised a three-day cruise of the new reservoir which included a ride beneath the bridge. When boats could no longer be squeezed through, it became, according to one, a "popular stunt to swim under the bridge and see what was on the other side." Finally, in the spring of 1969, Gregory Natural Bridge vanished underwater.⁶³ As an arm of Lake Powell, Fiftymile Creek resumed, for a time, its ancient meander around the bridge; the advancing water then spilled over the saddle of the bridge's roadway, leaving only a sandstone islet to mark the submerged formation.

Though not the first to go there, Norman Nevills discovered Gregory Natural Bridge in the sense he put a name to it and made the place widely known. Less than thirty years following that disclosure, the bridge permanently returned to anonymity.⁶⁴ Robbed of a physical setting, its history has been confined to libraries and the ephemeral memories of a few. Rarely does the flooded span draw mention today. It was, of course, but one of numerous scenic and historic places exchanged for a popular, undeniably attractive reservoir. If Gregory Natural Bridge has been forgotten since Lake Powell replaced it, the disregard could be attributed both to the abundant beauty remaining at Glen Canyon, and the considerable rivalry for regret.

—NOTES—

1. Gregory Natural Bridge was never measured exactly, so printed dimensions, particularly of the horizontal length, have varied.

2. Nevills, "BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CAPT. W. A. NEVILLS, W. E. NEVILLS, N. D. NEVILLS," box 1, Nevills Collection, Special Collections, Willard J. Marriott Library, University of Utah (hereafter NC).

3. This paper illuminates facets of Norman Nevills' character, but the discovery of Gregory Natural Bridge offers an incomplete picture of the man and his career. Unfortunately, no substantial biography has appeared. For the best published treatment of Nevills' life, see P.T. Reilly, "Norman Nevills: Whitewater Man of the West," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1987): 181-200. Also see Roy Webb, "Never Was Anything So Heavenly: Nevills Expeditions on the San Juan River," *Blue Mountain Shadows* 12 (Summer 1993): 35-50; Nancy Nelson, *Any Time, Any Place, Any River: The Nevills of Mexican Hat* (Flagstaff: Red Lake Books, 1991); William Cook, *The Wen, the Botany, and the Mexican Hat: The Adventures of the First Women Through Grand Canyon on the Nevills Expedition*, (Orangevale, California: Calisto Books, 1987); and David Lavender, *River Runners of the Grand Canyon* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), pp. 96-105.

4. Nevills to Clyde Eddy, August 9, 1939, box 8, NC.

5. Pyle, column of August 2, 1939, copy in NC.

6. Nevills, *SALIENT POINTS OF THE 1940 NEVILLS EXPEDITION*, enclosed with a letter to Al Runkle, November 29, 1939, box 18, NC.

7. Nevills, *The Value of the 1940 Nevills Colorado River Expedition As a National Network Program*, box 31, NC.

8. Nevills to (unidentified) Mr. and Mrs. Brown, October 25, 1939, box 5, NC.

9. Nevills to Wesley Heath, March 12, 1940, box 11, NC.

10. Nevills to Chester Doherty, March 19, 1940, box 10, NC.

11. Nevills to Jack Breed, October 22, 1939, box 5, NC. Nevills was more adept at making plans than implementing them; most of these were scaled back or left unrealized. Despite Nevills' best efforts, the 1940 expedition received less attention than the 1938 expedition.

12. Nevills to Wesley Heath, October 22, 1939, box 11, NC. Nevills sent a near-verbatim story to at least three others, and abbreviated versions to several more.

13. Nevills to Gregory, January 8, 1940, box 10, NC. Herbert Ernest Gregory (1869-1952), for whom the bridge was eventually named, was a Yale doctorate, a prominent and prolific U.S.G.S field geologist, an educator, amateur historian, and long-time head of the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii. His many superior reports on the landforms of southern Utah and northern Arizona served both scientists and hardy tourists.

14. From photographs of the register, box 319, Otis Marston Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter MC).

15. Herbert E. Gregory and Raymond C. Moore, *The Kaiparowits Region: A Geographic and Geologic Reconnaissance of Parts of Utah and Arizona*, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 164 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), pp. 144-45. Gregory perpetuated the misnomer Fortymile Creek. As noted, the bridge spanned Fiftymile Creek (also called Soda Gulch); Fortymile Creek is found upstream on the Escalante. Strangely, Gregory's map, and the excellent 1922 U.S.G.S. river profile sheets Chenoweth helped prepare (see sheet G), did not mark the bridge, though "Forty Mile Creek" appeared on both. Gregory Natural Bridge finally appeared on the U.S.G.S. 15 minute *The Rincon* topographic map, published in 1953.

16. Hugh D. Miser, *The San Juan Canyon, South-eastern Utah: A Geographic and Hydrographic Reconnaissance*, U. S. Geological Survey Water-Supply Paper 538 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), plate 15.

17. Nevills to Hugh Miser, February 26, 1947, box 15, NC. In early 1940, Nevills invited Gregory to come on the trip; "It would be most appropriate for you to name [the bridge]." The geologist was tempted; despite years of field work around Glen Canyon, he had never floated its length. He declined for insufficient time and money.

18. Hugh Cutler to Otis Marston, July 8, 1948, box 37, MC. As late as 1952, river runner Harry Aleson took some stock in a "rumor of a member of a survey party - Escalante channel - who was sore at the boss, and failed ... to report a big bridge..." Ironically, in the same letter Aleson criticized the "Nevills' school of dramatics." Aleson to Otis Marston, March 17, 1952, box 7, Aleson collection, Utah State Historical Society Library.

19. Nevills to Hugh Cutler, November 9, 1939, box 6, NC. Days before, Nevills had updated Thorn Mayes: "[The bridge has] been a great thing for me to go on in selling the trip." That was probably an over-optimistic appraisal. Of the passengers who committed to the trip, none, it would seem, did so primarily for the bridge.

20. Nevills to Gregory, April 17, 1940, box 10, NC.

21. Nevills, "Canyon Wonderland," *Region Three Quarterly* 2 (July 1940): 37-42, p. 42.

22. Nevills, "Descent of the Canyons," *Region Three Quarterly* 3 (July 1941): 37-44, p. 42.

23. Kelly, "Proposed Escalante National Monument," *Desert Magazine* 4 (February 1941): 21-22.

24. See Elmo R. Richardson, "Federal Park Policy in Utah: The Escalante National Monument Controversy of 1935-1940," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1965): 109-133. In 1950, the National Park Service presented the comparatively modest "Canyon Lands of Utah Suggested Plan for Recreational Use," in *A Survey of the Recreational Resources of the Colorado River Basin* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), plate 9. It identified Glen Canyon below The Rincon as one of two zones of "national importance for parks and recreation" (the other encompassed eventual Canyonlands National Park). A tract including the lower Escalante River, Hole-in-the-Rock, and Hidden Passage was recommended for withdrawal. The Park Service mentioned Gregory Natural Bridge as one of "at least six fine bridges in the twisting half-domed tributary canyons of the Escalante River" (p. 172).

25. Nevills to Gregory, April 17, 1940, *ibid.*

26. "Nevills Describes Thrilling Trip," *Moab Times-Independent*, February 8, 1940, copy in MC; "Utahn Plans to Repeat Voyage Down Hazardous Colorado," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 13, 1940, p. 17.

27. Madsen to Nevills, April 5, 1940; and Nevills in reply, April 25, 1940, box 23, NC. At the last minute, using information from a news story, the W.P.A. writers inserted a note about the bridge into the *Utah Guide* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), p. 441. As well, Nevills' "discovery" occupied a noteworthy place in the *Chronology* of Utah history (pp. 531-37), spanning four centuries, 1540 to 1940. The first entry concerned a Spanish explorer; the very last concerned what passed as a modern explorer: "Gregory Natural Bridge discovered by Norman Nevills."

28. Nevills, *FIRST BULLETIN NORMAN NEVILLS COLORADO RIVER EXPEDITION 1940*, box 31, NC.

29. Nevills to Jack Breed, October 22, 1939, *ibid.*

30. Mildred Baker, "Rough Water," *American Forests* 50 (November 1944): 520-25+, p. 525; Baker, 1940 journal, copy of typescript, pp. 28-29, box 284, MC.

31. John Southworth to Otis Marston, October 16, 1948, box 212, MC. He was not the only one ever to disparage the bridge. Later visitor Claire Noall could only say this: "...A clumsy irregular beam in rusty sandstone spans half the gulch." "The Story of Utah's Canyons," part 2, in *Treasures of Pioneer History*, vol. 6, ed. Kate Carter (D. U. P: Salt Lake City, 1957), p. 460. Gregory Natural Bridge was often examined unfavorably next to incomparable Rainbow Bridge. In the January 1941 *Arizona Highways*, Barry Goldwater stated that the bridge "in no way compares with the Rainbow Natural Bridge in beauty..." In the May 18, 1946 *Saturday Evening Post*, Neil M. Clark described Gregory Natural Bridge as "almost as big as Rainbow, but less picturesque." In the September 1949 *National Geographic*, Jack Breed curtly noted that Fiftymile Creek contained "one bridge—a massive affair called Gregory Bridge... But it is no Rainbow."

Some were less concerned about comparative size and aesthetics. "Altho the bridge dimensions have been lowered in estimations," Harry Aleson wrote in 1959, "The Gregory has not, [and] will always remain a natural beauty."

32. Nevills, "Descent of the Canyons," p. 42.

33. Nusbaum to Nevills, March 27, 1940, box 23, NC.

34. Error would be expected, but Nevills' figures were inflated enough to suggest the possibility of deliberate exaggeration. The purported total height of the bridge fell just four feet short of Rainbow Bridge's 309 feet. Otis Marston (not always a reliable source) said that Nevills bragged in private that Gregory Natural Bridge actually measured three feet *higher* than Rainbow Bridge; not wanting to take away from Rainbow's glory, he lowered the figure. Marston, interviewed by Jay M. Haymond and John F. Hoffman, May 28, 1976, typescript, pp. 19-22, Utah State Historical Society Library. Mildred Baker, responding in 1948 to Marston's contention that Nevills faked the measurements, made two good points: "Why anyone should want to deceive in this manner is simply beyond comprehension, for surely later on the bridge would be more accurately surveyed and the 'error' be brought to light. However, some people have a queer psychology."

35. Nevills took notes on his U.S.G.S. river profile sheets which were cut to fit a handmade map-holder mounted to his boat. Box 34, NC.

36. Charles Larabee to Otis Marston, July 16, 1948, box 113, MC.

37. Goldwater, *Delightful Journey Down the Green and Colorado Rivers* (Tempe: Arizona Historical Foundation, 1970; repr., Phoenix: privately printed, 1940), p. 62. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names never rendered a decision on the name (for it was never found to be in conflict), but it officially recognized Gregory Natural Bridge in 1953.

38. "River Runners Find Huge Natural Arch," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 3, 1940, p. 28. The Associated Press distributed the article. After reading an account, William Chenoweth "became curious and wondered," he wrote Nevills, August 15, 1940, "if by chance we saw the same bridge." Nevills replied cautiously: "Please, don't feel that we have attempted to discredit your find, but actually the bridge was seen even before your visit in 1921.---The important thing was to bring to public attention this bridge, in order to stimulate and further interest in the proposed Escalante Mon. area in which this bridge lies." Box 315, MC.

39. Southworth, "Colorado River in a Row Boat," *Mines Magazine* 32 (part 1, March 1942): 120-22.

40. Larabee to Otis Marston, July 16, 1948, box 113, MC; Larabee, as told to Horace S. Mazet, "Riding the Rapids of the Grand Canyon," *Travel* 91 (June 1948): 4-9+

41. Weldon Heald to Otis Marston, August 27, 1949, box 315, MC.

42. Margaret Marston, 1945 diary, box 285, MC. Marston's wife (and twin daughters) came on the river trip, but did not hike to the bridge.

43. Reilly, "Norman Nevills As I Knew Him" (1985), p. 5, box 1, Reilly Collection, Utah State Historical Society Library.

44. Nevills, as told to Neill C. Wilson, "Running the Colorado's Rapids," part 2, *The Olympian* 31 (January 1943): 10-11+. Nevills' exaggerated measurements persisted for some time. The official 1950 visitor information pamphlet at Natural Bridges National Monument read, "Among known natural bridges [the three at the monument] are exceeded in size only by the great Rainbow Bridge ... and the more recent discovery, Gregory Bridge."

45. Nevills to Gregory, August 13, 1945, box 10, NC; also Nevills to Alfred Bailey, May 27, 1947, box 5, NC.

46. Pyle, column of August 2, 1939. Frank Masland offered insight into the character of his friend, Norman Nevills: "There wasn't anything small about the guy except his stature. His faults were big ones, so were his virtues. His likes and dislikes were apparent. His emotions weren't buried very deeply. He was temperamental and an extrovert, in many ways a kid still learning - the hard way. But in my book he was a man...". Masland to Mildred Baker, February 8, 1950, box 124, MC.

47. Gregory to Nevills, September 6, 1940, box 10, NC; Gregory's field books (see 293 and 294) are located in the U.S.G.S. Field Records Library, Denver.

48. Marston, interview notes, Fruita, Utah, April 30, 1949, box 315, MC.

49. Kelly to Julius Stone, February 11, 1941, excerpted copy, box 315, MC.

50. Chenoweth to Marston, October 25, 1953, box 316, MC.

51. Marston, interview notes, Green River, Utah, May 6, 1949, box 316, MC.

52. Tasker wrote this rhyme in the Rainbow Bridge visitor register, but it easily applies to Gregory Natural Bridge. Box 319, MC.

53. Heald, "The Canyon Wilderness," in *The Inverted Mountains: Canyons of the West*, ed. Roderick Peattie (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1948), p. 245. It would have been more accurate to say that the little-known Glen Canyon region offered some of the last opportunities to *officially* discover geographic features. (Heald felt the "explorer's fever" this could engender.) Ranchers and miners—not to mention Native Americans—explored the canyons previously. "...If there is a spot in Utah that These old Mormon cowmen had not visited 50 years ago I do not know of it," rock-hound A. L. Inglesby wrote. "To be a firster you must have [had] a lot of Guts." Inglesby to Marston, January 22, 1958, box 96, MC.

54. Jesse Nusbaum, "Certain Aspects of the Proposed Escalante National Monument in Southeastern Utah," *Region Three Quarterly* 2 (July 1940): 27-30, p. 27.

55. 1952, 1955, and 1959. Box 315, MC. That Gregory Natural Bridge became relatively familiar is indicated by its presence on several Utah road maps. See, for example, those distributed by Texaco in 1960, Chevron in 1961, and Phillips 66 in 1963. All the same, in a 1962 Glen Canyon historical salvage study report, C. Gregory Crampton described the lower Escalante region as "scarcely known to tourists and vacationers."

56. Sleight, Wonderland Expeditions newsletter, July 1963, box 29, Aleson Collection, Utah State Historical Society Library.

57. Jett, "Last Trip Down the Escalante and Glen Canyon," pp. 6-7, copy of typescript, box 315, MC. Fred Eiseman, who visited the bridge in 1958, felt similar amazement—though he had, while hiking up the Escalante River ("knee deep mud and quicksand, 50 lb. pack and all"), questioned whether the effort was merited. He received a definite answer: "...There it was, a huge picture book bridge, carved out the bright hued Navajo, with a picturesque stream flowing beneath it, a blue sky and white cumulus clouds. It was worth it." "Gregory Bridge," draft of unpublished article, box 315, MC.

58. Alvey, "The Escalante Country," in *The Escalante Story*, by Nethella King Woolsey (Springville: Art City Publishing Company, 1964), p. 16.

59. Veater to Otis Marston, January 16, 1949, box 316, MC.

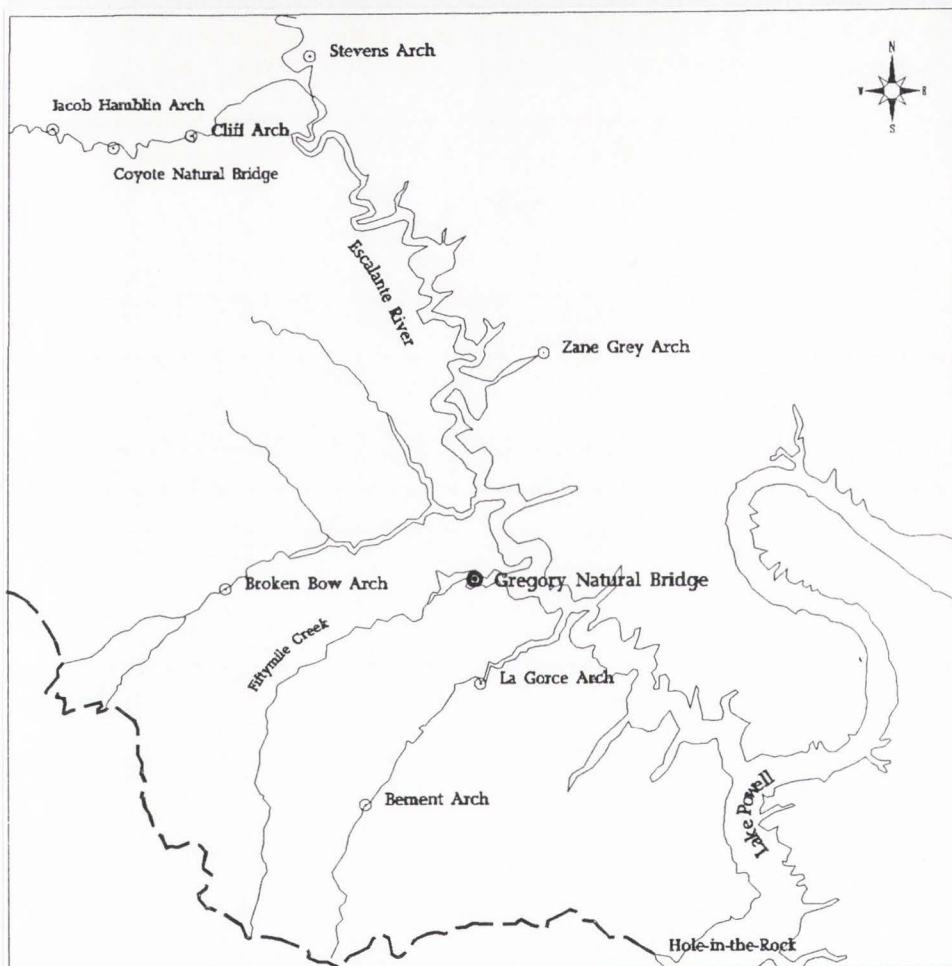
60. Nevills, untitled draft of "Descent of the Canyons," p. 8, box 28, NC. Others in Utah's southland eventually came around to Nevills' thinking. The amateur but forward-looking See Southern Utah Committee saw financial potential in expanded tourism. Each page of its pamphlet *Your Guide to Scenic Southern Utah* (1952) showcased an attraction sponsored by a local business; Willford B. Griffin, Escalante mechanic ("FOR DEPENDABILITY BE UTOCOIZED"), invited travelers to see "fantastic" Gregory Natural Bridge, "one of the great erosion sculptures of the world!"

61. Dominy, "Yours to Discover," *Western Gateways* 5 (Spring 1965): p. 12-15+.

62. Jean Duffy, "Rising Waters Open Vistas," *Arizona Republic*, November 15, 1964, section C, p. 13, copy in MC. The same story, under a slightly different title, appeared in the *Salt Lake Tribune* a few days later. "...Formerly accessible only to the most hardy," the article went in a standard vein, the Escalante River "can now be seen by the general public." For Lake Powell boosters, the death of Glen Canyon and environs (including wonders like Gregory Natural Bridge) was necessary for new and better life: "a river disappears/a lake rises/some beauty is lost/a much wider world of beauty is found/a new world of recreation is ours." Al Ball, "Lake Powell: New Found Beauty," *Lake Powell Vacationland* 2 (1964 edition): 6-10+, p. 8. Ken Sleight, by contrast, viewed the reservoir indignantly: "As I see it, all that will be 'opened up' was already there before. It was certainly open to all of you who made the effort to do a little exploring." Wonderland Expeditions newsletter, July 1963. For photographs of other spans terminated by Lake Powell, see Robert Vreeland, *Nature's Bridges and Arches*, vol. 7 (self-published, 1976), pp. 46-5.

63. John Butchart to Marston, June 14, 1968, box 315, MC. See F. A. Barnes, *Canyon Country Arches and Bridges* (Moab: Canyon Country Publications, 1987), pp. 404-405, for a description of a final boat ride under the bridge. Barring extreme prolonged drought or decommission of the dam, the bridge will not be seen again. Conceivably, the span opening might silt up. How well the sandstone structure is wearing under water is open to speculation.

64. The U.S.G.S. topographic map *The Rincon* was given "minor corrections" in 1968; they included erasing Gregory Natural Bridge off the sheet. The detailed 7.5 minute *Davis Gulch* quadrangle, published in 1987, does not mark the submerged bridge. Since the mid-1960s, the name Gregory has been applied (unofficially) to a prominent butte overlooking Last Chance Bay on Lake Powell. That makes two buttes named for the geologist; the other is located in the Kolob section of Zion National Park. (Before nearby Kolob Arch was officially named, Gregory Arch had been considered.)



Arches and bridges of the lower Escalante River basin, Kane County, Utah

NAMING LA GORCE ARCH

Geographic place names are less about places than people. Names connote human association with landscapes. The stories behind place names are commonly straightforward or mundane; occasionally they are intricate. Under the latter category falls La Gorce Arch. The natural window in question, located in Davis Gulch, a tributary of southern Utah's Escalante River, has been named and renamed several times. Perhaps surprisingly, none of the designations depict the dazzling terrain; all to some degree commemorate people—including the Anasazi, a U.S. president, and wanderer Everett Ruess. Those who gave the names include local ranchers, a *National Geographic* correspondent, and river runner Harry Aleson. Viewed beyond the obvious—disconnected events played out by colorful characters—the naming history of La Gorce Arch poses meaningful problems with wide application. Who has the right to name a place? What, if anything, is a proper place name?

The story starts in 1875, the year Mormon settlers laid the neat lines of a new townsite, carving Escalante from Potato Valley. Soon thereafter, stockmen began exploring the maze-like canyon system of the Escalante River basin. Eventually an anonymous rancher entered Davis Gulch, a slickrock gash located fifty miles southeast of the village. Finding water and pasture in good supply, he probed the length of the ravine. The entrenched passageway snaked wildly; Navajo sandstone walls, lofty and thin, separated loop from canyon loop. One projecting wall, dramatically undercut by stream erosion, was perforated by an arch—a huge natural bullet hole. The rancher (or a subsequent fellow) dubbed the spectacle Moqui Window. An outmoded designation for the Hopi, Anasazi, or basically anything prehistoric, the name Moqui derived

from inscriptions and ruins left by early inhabitants of Davis Gulch. These ancient ones may have had their own appellation for the arch—but unlike their paint and mortar, names cannot linger.

Some three-quarters of a century after the Escalante rancher, Lake Powell made its entrance into stunning Davis Gulch. A slack arm of the behemoth reservoir now rises and falls at the base of the arch. Boaters by the tens of thousands idle motors there annually. Prior to Glen Canyon Dam, completed in 1963, the scene looked very different. Hidden in a wilderness of rock, the arch attracted negligible attention. Not until the 1940s, when river runner Harry Aleson began tramping around Glen Canyon, was Moqui Window first renamed.

* * *

After war, college, work, and marriage, Harry LeRoy Aleson discovered the Colorado River and discovered himself. In 1940, the novice but zealous river rat moved his belongings to an isolated cove of Lake Mead, a far cry from his Iowa roots. MY HOME, Arizona, he called the place—invariably using capital letters. "Give me the redrock canyon country!" he later exclaimed, declaring his love. "Tell me that I can live twenty years in all of Europe -- and one year in my beloved Colorado River Canyons -- and I'll take the ONE year." Gradually, perhaps inevitably, Aleson turned to professional river guiding. In time he transferred his base camp from MY HOME to the comparatively plush Johnston Hotel in Richfield, Utah.¹

Before doing guidework, Aleson gained notoriety as a daredevil. For instance, he twice floated the lower Grand Canyon using nothing but a life jacket—"damnably cold," as he put it. Repeatedly he attempted—and failed—to run the big canyon backwards, bucking rapids using boats equipped with powerful outboard motors. In 1945, Aleson and three friends became the

first to traverse the full length of (rapid-less) Glen Canyon in reverse, from Lee's Ferry, Arizona to Hite, Utah. To crown that trip, Aleson intended to visit Gregory Natural Bridge, located in a secluded tributary of the Escalante River. Instead he stumbled across another natural span—Moqui Window.

Massive Gregory Natural Bridge (now completely submerged by Lake Powell) had been officially—if not genuinely—discovered in 1940 by Mexican Hat river runner Norman Nevills. The pre-planned "discovery" occurred during a two-month passenger trip down the Green and Colorado rivers. Discovery publicity notwithstanding, the remote window remained a tourist non-attraction. By April 1945, when Harry Aleson pushed off from John D. Lee's old sanctuary, still only a handful had *ever* seen the bridge.²

After fighting the Colorado's current for 88 twisting miles, Aleson's small party reached the canyon mouth of the Escalante River. There they beached the boat and killed the noisy motor. Despite "cold & gloomy" spring weather, they started the hike to Gregory Natural Bridge. Hiking soon turned to wading. Fed by recent snowmelt, the Escalante filled its narrow banks. Aleson and Bering Monroe (born near the Bering Strait) stripped their shoes and socks without hesitation, but Ed Hudson and Ed Hudson, Jr. entertained second thoughts. They "stuck there [*sic*] hands in [their pockets]," Monroe recorded in his diary, and "said they had changed their minds about being the Second white men to visit Gregory Natural Bridge - the Pansies!!" The "white men" notion was fantasy, but it helps explain why Monroe, a California businessman, was willing—even eager—to endure what he called "the most strenuous work any human could devise[:] climbing cliffs - bucking brush [-] wading river (ice cold) etc. etc."³

Since Gregory Natural Bridge did not appear on any maps, Aleson and Monroe relied on

the privately printed diary of one of Norman Nevills' 1940 passengers, Barry Goldwater. According to the future senator, the bridge lay "eight and a half miles up Escalante, then one and a half miles up Forty-Mile Canyon into the second canyon on the right. ... By way of directions, Forty-Mile Canyon is the third on the left [west] up Escalante."⁴ Unfortunately, Aleson and Monroe found out, the directions were erroneous. They bushwhacked one mile into the third western canyon (an unnamed draw) before encountering a dry waterfall, smooth and insurmountable.

Discouraged, Aleson and Monroe backtracked to the Escalante River and continued their "grueling grind" to the next western tributary (Davis Gulch). They made only short distance before heavy snow and impending nightfall forced them to retreat to a sheltered overhang near the tributary's mouth. Lacking blankets or pads, they combed the area for fire tinder. Fortunately they discovered a cord of pre-cut oak saplings. "Thanks Mr. Beaver," Monroe acknowledged. Sleep, however, did not come easily that night. The sore hikers froze from the cold on one side and baked from the flames on the other. "I've never in my life put in such a nite!!" the tenderfoot Monroe confessed next morning.

With meager breakfast in their bellies—one ounce of cheese, two squares of chocolate, and one slice of pecan roll each—they set off in renewed search for the elusive bridge. Beauty ameliorated their physical discomforts. It was, Aleson later described, a "Shangri-la sort of country. Thousands of maiden hair ferns grew along the undercut, graceful, sweeping bends of the canyon wall." Perhaps one additional marvel should not have surprised them. "My God, look at that!" Monroe exclaimed. He beheld not Gregory Natural Bridge—or a bridge at all—but a huge picture window cut in stone.⁵

They could not stay long—their food was all gone—but Monroe found time to expose some fifty negatives of the majestic cavity. On the sandstone face below it, Aleson and Monroe carved their initials and the date. Returning to the Escalante River, they constructed twin cairns to mark the mouth of the side canyon. After two-dozen crossings of the frigid stream, they rejoined the Hudsons by the boat. The hikers devoured a warm meal by the blazing driftwood campfire. Blistered but happy, they felt a "certain pride to have found a natural wonder in an unsurveyed area of Colorful Utah."⁶

Once off the river, Aleson and Monroe reported their discovery to local newspapers. The Associated Press eventually picked up the story. "Exploring the U.S. didn't stop with the frontier's passing," concluded one magazine, noting, however, that "Geologists at the U.S. Geological Survey raised eyebrows at the claimed 'discovery.'"⁷ Aleson and Monroe were not genuine discoverers, of course, but they had *acted* the part: enduring physical hardships, uncovering an outstanding formation, leaving their initials, taking photographs, notifying the newspapers. They required only one more act—to name their find. Since he had glimpsed the arch first, Monroe was "privileged to name it." "After due consideration," Aleson recounted, "Bering chose the name, 'ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL NATURAL BRIDGE.'"⁸

Franklin D. Roosevelt passed away 12 April 1945, a few days after the upriver trip. Naturally one might interpret Monroe's naming as an act of veneration or war patriotism. Only that would be wrong. Whatever Monroe's feelings about F. D. R., they did not preclude exploitation of the man's name. More than a memorial to the late president, Roosevelt Memorial Natural Bridge was a monument to self-interest. Monroe wrote Aleson:

I believe our bridge would stir up considerable interest by so nameing [sic] it---d[ue] to the recent death and subsequent worldwide mourning for Roosevelt--surely it would get national newspaper publicity & possibly create a desire on the part of the rite people to want to see it--see it for a substantial consideration--it's worth a thousand dollars or so to take a party in to it!⁹

Tellingly, before appropriating the Roosevelt title, Monroe considered another self-serving name for the arch—his own. In Davis Gulch, the first thing Monroe penciled in his diary after seeing the arch was

"Hooray"

I found a Natural

Bridge -

"Monroe Natural Bridge"

Incredibly, Monroe Natural Bridge wound up in print—albeit in a low-budget publication for tourists called *Scenic Southwest*.¹⁰ But in the end Monroe favored Roosevelt Memorial Bridge. The presidential name never stuck, however; it failed to attract the hoped-for national newspaper publicity. Harry Aleson did not seem to mind much. "Frankly," he once voiced, "I never did like much connected with the Roosevelt Dynasty."¹¹ The river runner—a staunch libertarian who liked to boast that he never paid his income taxes—developed two alternative names for the arch. Both sprang from his inquiries into the history of Davis Gulch.

* * *

"This thing about being FIRST to find or run across a natural feature," Aleson noted in

1952, "is a peculiarly strange vain experience."¹² In 1945, after the delirium of discovery had abated somewhat, Aleson began passing word about the arch to Escalante and Boulder natives, "looking for refutation," but still "hoping we were first to see, photograph, and estimate [its] size..."¹³ To aid his information search, Aleson returned to Davis Gulch with a movie camera. He then projected the color film to several southern Utah audiences, inquiring afterward if anyone had seen the natural window before. In the second year of showing the film, one Peter Orrin Barker of Escalante approached Aleson. Barker had, by his own account, visited the arch "about 25 years ago." Aleson trusted the old-timer's words because on his return visit to Davis Gulch the river runner had noticed a lightly scratched *P O B* on the arch. Supposing he had discovered the first (white) person to have seen the window, Aleson began referring to Peter Orrin Barker Arch in his letters. The unwieldy name never got past the river runner's typewriter, however, and he eventually discontinued using it. That was just as well, since Barker was not—by several decades—the first Escalantean to see the arch. Aleson's second (and more applicable) place name, derived from Everett Ruess, found wider acceptance.

Everett Ruess has become something of a myth figure in southern Utah. An intelligent, sensitive, pretentious college drop-out, Ruess tramped about the Southwest in the early 1930s, carving block prints and penning letters along his way. He preferred to travel alone, following beauty wherever it took him. In 1934, shy of twenty-one years old, Ruess entered the slickrock wilderness south of Escalante and never returned. "As to when I shall visit civilization," he forecasted in his final letter, "it will not be soon, I think." In Davis Gulch, search parties found Ruess' hungry burros, remains of his last camp, and two enigmatic inscriptions: "NEMO 1934." His disappearance remains a mystery.¹⁴

An excerpt from one of Ruess' letters suggests the urgent aspect of the wanderer's personality:

But he who has looked long on naked beauty may never return to the world, and though he should try, he will find its occupation empty and vain, and human intercourse purposeless and futile. Alone and lost, he must die on the altar of beauty.¹⁵

Harry Aleson became intrigued with this peculiar young man, particularly after the river runner learned that he and Monroe had unwittingly entered Davis Gulch. Aleson returned to the canyon many times. In 1948, he guided Stella Ruess, Everett's aging mother, to the "wildly-slashed Escalante River canyon country" to see her son's last haunt, passing the arch along the way. "Perhaps no man living," Aleson boasted, "has spent as much time in searching for traces of the lost young man as has Harry Aleson of Richfield, Utah."¹⁶ Out of his affection for the wanderer, Aleson decided, "I would like to see the unknown Roosevelt Arch renamed the 'Everett Ruess Sipapu,' or something in remembrance of Everett."¹⁷ Accordingly, in his correspondence after 1950 he referred to "'ROOSEVELT' [in quotes] or EVERETT RUESS MEMORIAL WINDOW." It was the designation Aleson favored the rest of his life.

The Ruess place name deserves special mention because a variant appeared in print. The publication was *Desert Magazine*, the unique and charming periodical for Southwestern desert rats and rock-hounds. Its subscribers had been introduced to Everett Ruess in 1939 when *Desert* serially printed several of his lyrical letters. Warm reader response warranted production in the next year of a slender anthology, *On Desert Trails with Everett Ruess*.

Randall Henderson, *Desert's* founder and longtime editor, "grew very fond of this young

vagabond," and "looked forward to the time when I could follow Everett's trail in that Utah country...". He hit the trail in May 1950, after rendezvousing with Harry Aleson at Escalante. Their plan was to leisurely ride the Escalante River's spring runoff in inflatable rafts. Unfortunately, nature did not cooperate. The title of Henderson's subsequent article summarized the trip: "When the Boats Wouldn't Float, We Dragged 'Em!" The editor had "wanted to spend a couple of days exploring [Davis Gulch] with Aleson, but Ol' Man River had been so stingy with his water that we were two days behind schedule and provisions were running low." Henderson was not able to see the arch in Davis Gulch, but Aleson filled him in. The map which accompanied the article indicated *Everett Ruess Bridge*.¹⁸

Without a strong rival name, Ruess Bridge (or Window, or Arch) probably would have lasted to this day. Such was not to be. In 1955, a staff writer for *National Geographic* christened the arch in honor of the magazine's editor-in-chief, John Oliver La Gorce.¹⁹ It was a presumptuous designation, perhaps, but one following precedent: only years before, another arch in southern Utah had been named for La Gorce's predecessor, Gilbert Grosvenor.

* * *

Grosvenor Arch—the name survives today—was the creation of travel photographer/writer Jack Breed. In 1948, his so-called Escalante Expedition drove to "the edge of the last frontier in Utah." The expedition's mobile headquarters was a "handsome" wooden-finish Pontiac station wagon equipped with "built-in bed with innerspring mattress, sheets, screens, and ice chest." "Despite such luxuries," Breed insisted, "exploring southern Utah's wild and forbidding Escalante Country is tough going." The vehicle carried the flags of the National Geographic Society (of Washington) and the Explorers Club (of Manhattan). Incongruously, eleven of the fifteen

"adventurers" hailed from southern Utah hamlets Panguitch, Tropic, Cannonville, and Henrieville. The expedition resembled a dude trip. Breed—a native of Swampscott, Massachusetts and a graduate of Harvard—asked one of his chaperons, "Did you ever hear of any natural bridges or arches in this country?" "I've heard tell of one or two," John Johnson reportedly drawled in reply, "but in my 40 years here I've never seen any. I'm always too busy looking for stray cattle or good grass feed to notice the scenery." Jack Breed, by contrast, was *paid* to notice the scenery.²⁰

The Escalante Expedition's greatest achievement, if one can call it that, was the "discovery" of a striking double arch. Breed described the event dramatically in *National Geographic*:

With binoculars I scanned the country beyond us. Carefully studying every fold and canyon in a high white palisade four miles to the north, I thought I could see a break through one of its numerous fins. The others agreeing, we set forth toward the gleaming palisade. Our highest expectations were soon realized. What we saw was an arch—a new arch, uncharted and unnamed!

In fact, the arch was not unknown (one of Breed's Kodachrome prints of the formation showed a prominent dirt road in the background), or unnamed (some ranchers—evidently not those in Breed's company—called it Butler Valley Arch). Obviously Breed bestowed his own moniker, celebrating the man who had "done more than any other person to arouse public interest in geography."²¹ Doing so, he added to a mountain range, an island, a glacier, a lake, a fish, a shell, a street, and even a Chinese drug plant already named for Gilbert Grosvenor.²²

Bitten by the discovery bug, Breed traveled east, lured by "tall tales about many natural

bridges and arches that supposedly were hidden" in tributaries of the Escalante River. The party "explored each canyon carefully," but not carefully enough: Breed saw only Gregory Natural Bridge, which failed to impress him. He did in fact enter Davis Gulch—only to be promptly chased out by a cantankerous bull.²³

The flag of the National Geographic Society returned to Davis Gulch six years later, at which time La Gorce Arch finally received its name. Utah State Aeronautics Commission director Harlon Bement initiated the follow-up expedition. Piloting above the Escalante River's twisting gorge, Bement had caught glimpses of immense rock spans. "No one in Salt Lake City quite believed me when I told them about the arches," he claimed. "That's why I wrote to the National Geographic Society." The magazine eventually dispatched Robert Moore of the Foreign Editorial Staff to southern Utah (practically a foreign country!). After a convincing view from Bement's airplane, Moore made plans for a pack trip into the broken Escalante country.²⁴

In heat of summer, 1954, Moore nosed around the western tributaries of the lower Escalante River. Accompanying him was Burnett Hendryx (manager of a Panguitch motel) and two Escalante cowboys. The party entered Davis Gulch mid-way, descending a precipitous stock trail both Jack Breed and Everett Ruess had used before. While the Escalanteans napped in the cool shade of a canyon wall, Moore and Hendryx made their way downstream to the arch. Hendryx, like the snoozing pair, had heard of the formation but not a name for it. Moore therefore concluded—somewhat prematurely—that the arch had no name; and as he felt Grosvenor Arch deserved a complement, "[T]o us this hitherto unnamed arch in lower Davis canyon became La Gorce Arch."

As Moore soon discovered, peerless Davis Gulch encloses more than one major arch.

Above La Gorce Arch and present-day Lake Powell lies a massive ruddy flying buttress. Some locals called it Nemo Arch (after Everett Ruess' inscriptions downstream), a fact Moore did not know when he visited the place.

"Why not Bement Arch?" I suggested. Certainly no person has been more enthusiastic in bringing the arches to outside attention. And few persons have keener interest than he in the scenic attractions of his State. Harlon Bement has flown up and down over Utah time and time again, exploring its little-known canyons, searching its desert areas, and photographing its weird rock formations. So Bement Arch it became.²⁵

Just like that. Some, like the *Salt Lake Tribune* editorial board, heartily approved:

[The name Bement Arch] is a fitting tribute—for the Escalante country, with its fantastic formations, its twisting canyons, colorful cliffs, pillars and monoliths and nature painted walls, is a mecca for the true explorer and wilderness lover. And thanks to Harlan [*sic*] Bement and the Geographic, more of them now will know of it—and knowing, these determined hunters of the unknown and almost inaccessible will be unable to resist coming to see.²⁶

Naturally Bement was flattered by the attention. However, he did not "look like a man who has an arch named after him." In the opinion of Salt Lake humor columnist Jack Valentine, that was commendable; "Because an arch is something that can go to a man's head real easy. ... [But] as I say, he's the same modest retiring fellow he was back in his arch-less days!"²⁷ The glowing character reference aside, the aviator was not insusceptible to hubris. "There are eight bridges and arches in this [Escalante] section," Bement declared in a 1955 letter, "two of which,

to my knowledge, *have never been seen before*, except by *myself* and, at a later date, by others accompanying *me* on aerial flights."²⁸

In his *National Geographic* article, Robert Moore did not explicitly claim that either Bement or he discovered the two Davis Gulch spans. But the journalist did not attempt to acknowledge who *had*; he offered only the following paltry information: "[F]ew persons other than cattlemen who have pastured herds along the Escalante River know anything about the river or its natural arches." If Moore had interviewed more of those cattlemen, he would have learned (among other things) that La Gorce Arch already had a name. As Fran Barnes, author of an arches and bridges guidebook, has expressed, "Anyone has the right to name a natural span," but that person "has a certain obligation to determine that the span does not already have a name."²⁹

Moore neglected his homework. Predictably, a few annoyed people familiar with the Escalante River wrote letters to *National Geographic* pointing that fact out. When Moore took it upon himself to name things, they felt, he unrightfully donned a discoverer's guise. On the defensive, the journalist tried to clarify: "Certainly there was no attempt on my part to make the story one of discovery; it was simply to report on and photograph the remarkable natural formations which appear in these canyons."³⁰ All the same, Moore's critics had a point. By naming a known window, he sent (however unintentionally) the paternalistic message that the National Geographic Society held the sole prerogative to legitimately discover it.

D. Elden Beck, a Brigham Young University zoology professor and author of one of the indignant letters, thought Moore had contracted the "virulent disease of *Firstitus*"—the consuming desire to do something, discover something, name something first. Though perchance accurate, that diagnosis seemed strange coming from Beck. Just years before, the B.Y.U. entomologist had

applied names to the trio of spans in nearby Coyote Gulch—spans local ranchers too had previously named. He affectionately described the terrain and his names in an article for the L.D.S. Church periodical *The Improvement Era*. What was the distinction between the two men? In Beck's eyes, it was apparently a question of time. He had spent many weeks over many years working and sweating in the Escalante River basin, while the journalist had taken a single jaunt. Put another way, possessiveness about Utah's canyonlands (as Beck surely felt) was justifiable if—and only if—long association preceded it. Beck deplored what he viewed as usurpation by johnny-come-latelies from the National Geographic Society—"minimizing to the point of almost disregard the energies and efforts of others with regard to discovery in order to magnify their own achievements."³¹

In fairness to Moore, one should point out that the writer apparently meant only to *propose* the name La Gorce Arch. Of course, mammoth *National Geographic* (no *Desert Magazine* or *Improvement Era*) was hardly the ideal forum for a proposal. Proposition became reality without any discussion. It comes as no surprise that La Gorce Arch immediately entered popular usage, considering that Moore's article made its way to some 2.1 million subscribers. Undoubtedly most magazine readers assumed that La Gorce Arch was a valid title for a previously unnamed feature. After all, as the Society's directors liked to crow,

The more complex modern life becomes throughout the world, the more valuable is unbiased information about it. Thus your National Geographic Society is dedicated firmly as ever to deserving the manifold plaudits it receives to this effect: "If you read it in THE GEOGRAPHIC, it's true!"³²



Most residents of backwoods Escalante, Utah were probably oblivious to *National Geographic* and Moqui Window's change of name. A few found out. Filling out a history questionnaire in 1955, old-timer Jess Barker encountered a query concerning La Gorce Arch. He did not—could not—answer. Instead, he double-underlined La Gorce and penciled, "What does the underscoring mean[?]" Though the name signified nothing to Barker, he got a message—an unwelcome one. "Call the Gulches what you want," he wrote resentfully. "To us they will still have their old name[s]."³³

He was not the only local upset. "In talking with Edson Alvey," Ken Sleight recorded,

I found he is quite preturbed [*sic*] also in the naming of features long past named... He calls the lower arch in Davis [Gulch], Moqui Window. ... There is a writing on the wall below the lower arch that calls it Moqui Window. I kind of suppose that possibly Edson had a little to do with the writing.³⁴

Powerless over the National Geographic Society, Alvey could only scribble graffiti in protest. Prefacing a 1982 compilation of Escalante place name derivations, the same Edson Alvey, school teacher and self-appointed town historian, noted, "There have been some attempts of late years to give new names to landmarks. This has been done by various groups who have come into the region from *the outside*." In his catalog Alvey segregated "new names" in parentheses: "Moqui Window (LaGarce) — An arch in the making, in Davis Gulch. The name was given by the pioneer stockmen of Escalante because of the ancient Indian remains in the canyon." The misspelling—"LaGarce"—may reflect local speech inflection, but foremost it

indicates what small regard an outsider's place name demanded in Alvey's eyes. He spelled Bement Arch as "Bemment Arch."³⁵

The trespass Alvey, Beck, and others felt when someone "from the outside" renamed landmarks was not unique to the Escalante River. Nor was it unique to arches and bridges. For another example, one need look no further than Utah's Natural Bridges National Monument. Here again place names entwined with territoriality.

* * *

In 1903, mining engineer Horace Long contracted cattleman Al Scorup to guide him to the rumored stone bridges in southeastern Utah's White Canyon. The rancher "annexed to his offer the condition that one of the arches should be named the 'Caroline' in honor of his mother."³⁶ Long agreed and ended up naming another of the bridges after his wife, Augusta. Scorup and Long dubbed the third and daintiest span Little Bridge. Little was relative: the bridge's horizontal length extended over 200 feet. The junior span received a new name two years later, when members of a Salt Lake City Commercial Club pack trip decided that Little Bridge was an unbecoming title for such a magnificent ribbon of stone. They re-christened the formation to honor their club president, Colonel Edwin F. Holmes. So no one would forget, the Salt Lakers boldly painted in black on the bridge's west abutment: *The Edwin*.

Spurred by enthusiastic reports from groups like the Commercial Club, Teddy Roosevelt created Natural Bridges National Monument—Utah's first monument—by executive order in 1908. Government Land Office surveyor William Boone Douglass later arrived in San Juan County to determine just what the president had established. Douglass was additionally instructed to ascertain whether the local Native American population had names for the bridges. The Paiutes

apparently did not, but the surveyor took the liberty of inventing quasi-Native American (Hopi) names to place on his official map.

When the leader of the Commercial Club expedition, Henry Lavender Adolphus Culmer, learned of Douglass' move, he was irate. He penned an argumentative article, "Who Shall Name Our Natural Bridges?" Though his time at White Canyon had been quite brief, Culmer (like so many visitors to the canyon country) felt possessive about the landscape. His possessiveness extended to the names on the land. To justify his indignant feelings, Culmer aggrandized his activities in southern Utah, sounding not unlike Jack Breed or Harlon Bement:

On that [1905] trip the three greatest known bridges were carefully located and described, measured, sketched and photographed for the first time. Many have been there since, and some of them have published the account of their "discoveries," usually ignoring the fact that they were following a trail that we had made plain. ... An account of the exploration was published, with illustrations from my paintings of the bridges, by the National Geographical Society—the same authorities that passed on Peary's North Pole data. Other articles, on this subject, written by me, have been printed in various publications whose aggregate circulation runs into several millions.³⁷

With his proprietorship to the bridges ostensibly proved, Culmer ridiculed the outsider and the new names:

Now comes along a deputy United States Surveyor, W. B. Douglass... [who] takes it on himself to rename the Augusta bridge, calling it the "Sipapu." The Caroline is to be the "Kachina," and the Edwin shall be known as the "Owochomo." These sound like names of three funny men in a comic opera. ... The only name [Douglass] could find from the Indians around Bluff was "Mah-vah-talk-tump," being

the name for bridges in general. This would have been a good name for the comic opera itself, but it didn't seem to make a hit with Mr. Douglass, so he went afar into another region altogether [Hopi land], where they had a whole lot of names he could use. They would have nothing to do with his instructions, but he was going to rename those bridges if he had to go to South America.

"The fact is evident," he concluded, "that Douglass thought he saw an opening to name the bridges himself, after his own ideas, although without sense or authority; and now it remains to be seen whether the [Interior] department will stand for it. If it does, I suggest that Mr. Douglass be sent to the North Pole with a batch of Hopi names to re-christen the places named by Peary."³⁸ Culmer did *not* point out that his cherished Edwin Bridge was also the result of re-christening. Little Bridge, an uninspiring title, probably deserved to be replaced; only Culmer implied that he, unlike Douglass, possessed the sense and authority to do it. *Who shall name our natural bridges?* The answer: *Me*.

Culmer's protestations were ineffectual. William Douglass had the government and time on his side. Some mistakenly assumed that the former names at Natural Bridges National Monument "have been so long associated with the structures by the people of the region and through the various magazine articles that have appeared that it will be very difficult to secure a general recognition of the Hopi names now applied by the government."³⁹ Similarly, Harry Aleson thought it "likely that little will come from W[.] Robert Moore's naming of previously named places"—noting too in good humor that it was "human nature for us to poke fun at Johnny-come-latelies."⁴⁰ With time, however, both in White Canyon and in Davis Gulch, the new names entirely supplanted the old. As Fran Barnes has observed about arches and bridges, "...There is no guarantee that [an] assigned name will stick. A great many have not."⁴¹

* * *

La Gorce Arch stuck at once. Not until the mid-1970s, however, when one Robert Vreeland forced the issue, did the name receive official approval from the bureaucracy in charge of the nation's names. Vreeland (still active) could be described as an arch-collector; he fritters retirement visiting the myriad rock spans all over North America. He regards the Escalante River basin—"still remote and a little mysterious"—the "best area in the country for a vacation and has spent more time there than anywhere else."⁴² In 1974, Vreeland submitted to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names what he deemed the only legitimate name for La Gorce Arch—Moqui Window. The Board duly circulated his proposal for comments. W. L. Rusho (who later edited an Everett Ruess anthology) disliked La Gorce Arch too, but he questioned the suggested alternative:

The name "Moqui Window" is new to me, in spite of the fact that I have taken an official and personal interest in the area for the past 15 years. ... The name is considered an affront to the Hopi Indians, since "Moqui" means dead. ... Although used extensively, the name "LaGorce" is inappropriate, since Mr. LaGorce was merely an official of the National Geographic Society who had no personal association with either the arch or the general surrounding area. I would recommend instead the name Ruess Arch for the arch now known as LaGorce.⁴³

The superintendent of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (the Park Service administrative unit in charge of Lake Powell) responded favorably to Rusho's recommendation:

Should the renaming of these arches still be under consideration ... we would be in favor renaming

LaGorce Arch in honor of Everett Ruess, the young man who disappeared in Davis Canyon in 1934.

... We would not particularly favor the use of the term "Moqui" for either of the arches since this would raise some locale questions because there is a canyon further up Lake Powell called Moqui Canyon...⁴⁴

But the Park Service Regional Director raised objections:

Since the names LaGorce and Bement are shown on the 1969 USGS map of the area and on several local tour folders, and since both the U.S. Board on Geographic Names' Statement of Policy and the National Park Service Guidelines state clearly that an existing name should not be replaced unless it is a duplicate or is inappropriate, we would prefer that the present names of LaGorce and Bement be retained.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, a change to Ruess Arch was "still contemplated," the director wrote. It was a little ironic that government guidelines supported La Gorce Arch because the name also violated guidelines. A recent edition of the *Principles, Policies, and Procedures* of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names reads, "The Board will not consider names that commemorate or may be construed to commemorate living persons." La Gorce Arch was named in 1954; John Oliver La Gorce lived another five years. The reason for the rule discrepancy? Very simple: Robert Moore and the National Geographic Society never bothered to submit their place name. They circumvented the Board by taking La Gorce Arch directly to the public.

After closed-door deliberation, the Board decided to retain La Gorce Arch, thus avoiding the great nuisance of changing such a widely-printed and widely-spoken name. By 1974, drawn by maps, magazines, tour folders, and the enthusiastic recommendations of friends and neighbors, untold thousands of Lake Powell boaters had made their way to what they knew as La Gorce

Arch. Board policy did in fact favor local terminology, but by the 1970s few locals still referred to Moqui Window. As things stand today, one practically never hears about La Gorce Arch's alternate names.

What *should* this arch be called? Using the informal maxim *first in print, first in right*, Monroe Natural Bridge (!) would be considered the proper place name. Alternatively, by right of prior usage, Moqui Window would take precedence. Evaluated in terms of popular acceptance, however, the only correct name would be La Gorce Arch. In short, a clear-cut answer cannot be pinned down. Perhaps then it would be best to determine not name properness, but *appropriateness*. Judged accordingly, La Gorce Arch wants local relevance; Roosevelt Memorial Bridge likewise seems out of place; Monroe Natural Bridge smacks of vanity; Peter Orrin Barker Arch—which has absolutely no ring—commemorates a person without good reason; Moqui Window sounds crude. Of all the names that have been suggested, Ruess Arch (or a variant) fits the place best.

The issue, of course, is moot—because La Gorce Arch has been officially recognized, and, more meaningfully, because names do not matter. That is a platitude and a fact. Names people impose on landscapes are evocative at best, trite or irrelevant at worst. After all, how can a moniker communicate the essence of a natural place?

* * *

If anyone understood the arch's essence, surely that person was Everett Ruess. Unfortunately, whatever words the natural window may have inspired were lost with him. Shortly before descending into Davis Gulch, his metaphorical altar of beauty, Ruess stood on a high ridge near Escalante, on "what seems like the rim of the world." Using a bare minimum

of place names, Ruess depicted the grand vista before him:

My camp is on the very point of the divide, with the country falling away to the blue horizon on east and west. The last rays of the sun at evening and the first at dawn reach me. Below are steep cliffs where the canyon has cut its way up to the rim of the divide. Northward is the sheer face of Mount Kaiparowits, pale vermilion capped with white, a forested summit. West and south are desert and distant mountains.

Imagine the same passage revised by someone more concerned with names:

Below are the Straight Cliffs where Alvey Wash has cut its way up to the rim of Fifty Mile Mountain. Northward is the sheer face of Mount Kaiparowits (also called Canaan Mountain), pale vermilion capped with white, a forested summit of Ponderosa pine. West and south are the Escalante Desert and the distant Henry Mountains.

Here place names sap the landscape of its power; they mask the ineffable, *nameless* beauty Ruess experienced.

He concluded the paragraph this way: "Often as I wander, there are dream-like tinges when life seems impossibly strange and unreal. I think it is, too, only most people have so dulled their senses that they do not realize it."⁴⁶ One reflection of the dullness Ruess observed might be a preoccupation with names. Travelers to southern Utah too often fail to look past their itineraries. Like postcards, names become collectibles. Lifeless labels, rather than the experiences of living places, serve as points of geographic reference and remembrance.

Place names are practical, of course, even indispensable, but they are also inescapably

arbitrary. That point was forgotten by the participants of La Gorce Arch's naming history—a history which had little to do with a natural arch, and much to do with people. Their concerns, though not unimportant, appear quite small when set against the imposing canyons and arches of the Escalante River. The bare rock landscape reveals the transience and the poverty of names.

In other words, called Ruess, Moqui, La Gorce, or anything—or *nothing*—the same age-old aperture, stately and indifferent, would pierce the same curving sandstone wall.

—NOTES—

1. Harry Aleson to Otis Marston, 14 December 1952, box 8, Aleson Collection, Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter AC). For background on Aleson, see Gary Topping, "Harry Aleson and the Place No One Knew," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 52 (Spring 1984): 165-178; and David Lavender, *River Runners of the Grand Canyon* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).
2. See Jared Farmer, "Undiscovered to Undiscoverable: Gregory Natural Bridge," *Utah Historical Quarterly* (forthcoming).
3. Bering Monroe, 1945 journal, box 152, Otis Marston Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter MC).
4. Barry Goldwater, *A Journey Down the Green and Colorado Rivers, 1940* (Phoenix: H. Walker Publishing Company, 1940; repr. 1970), 33. Gregory Natural Bridge in fact spanned the *main branch* of the *fifth* side canyon on the west, Fiftymile Creek. Forty-mile Creek was a commonly-used misnomer.
5. Aleson, "Enormous Natural Bridge in Utah," unpublished article, box 29, AC, 5.
6. *Ibid.*, 8.
7. "Escalante Explorer, 1945," *Pathfinder* 52 (June 1945): 9-10.
8. Aleson, "Enormous Natural Bridge in Utah," 8.
9. Monroe to Aleson, 6 April 1945, box 1, AC. Monroe later gave a talk to a hometown audience; still caught up in the headiness of exploration, he related how he "discovered a hitherto unknown natural bridge hewn in the rock by the swirling river and that he named it Roosevelt Memorial Natural Bridge because he discovered it *on the day the late president died.*" *San Diego Union*, 7 February 1947, copy in MC, emphasis added.
10. "Harry Aleson and Party Battle Colorado River," *Scenic Southwest* 18 (May 1946): 5-6. A grainy photograph of the arch carried the caption, "Monroe Natural Bridge discovered April 3, 1945, by Bering Monroe and Harry Aleson..." As word of the "discovery" spread, the Utah Department of Publicity and Industrial Development contacted Monroe. They wanted pictures of the arch a description of its exact location. Moore could only supply the former, conceding that "it would be impossible for me to designate on the maps where this natural bridge is located." He had a place name, but no place to put it.
11. Aleson to Harold Bulger, 28 September 1959, box 14, AC.
12. Aleson to Otis Marston, 12 March 1952, box 6, AC.

13. Aleson to Julius Stone, 13 June 1945, box 1, AC.
14. See W.L. Rusho, *Everett Ruess: A Vagabond for Beauty*. (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983.)
15. Everett Ruess to Edward Gardner, May 1934, in Rusho, *Everett Ruess: A Vagabond for Beauty*, 148.
16. Aleson, copy of second draft of an unnamed article, 26 June 1948, which he sent to the *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), box 29, AC.
17. Aleson to Randall Henderson, 17 March 1952, box 7, AC. In Puebloan religions, *sipapu* is the hole in the floor of kiva which signifies the place of emergence.
18. Randall Henderson, "When the Boats Wouldn't Float, We Dragged 'Em," *Desert Magazine* 13 (September 1950): 5-13.
19. As late as 1965, however, Ward Roylance wrote that "[Davis Gulch's] lower end is flooded by Lake Powell, from which boaters may visit Ruess Arch...". Roylance, *Utah, The Incredible Land: A Guide to the Beehive State* (Salt Lake City: Utah Trails Company), 140.
20. Jack Breed, "First Motor Sortie into Escalante Land, Utah" *National Geographic Magazine* 96 (September 1949): 369-404. Breed also gave nearby Kodachrome Flat (now Kodachrome Basin) its name. He chastised aesthetically blind locals for calling the splendor spot "Thorny Pasture." (Actually they called it *Thorly* Pasture.) Evidently Breed felt that a brand name suited the place better.
21. *Ibid.*, 369-70.
22. See Albert W. Atwood, "Gilbert Grosvenor's Golden Jubilee," *National Geographic Magazine* 96 (August 1949): 252-61.
23. Breed, "First Motor Sortie into Escalante Land," 404.
24. Robert Moore, "Escalante: Utah's River of Arches," *National Geographic Magazine* 108 (September 1955): 399-425, 399.
25. *Ibid.*, 416.
26. "Utah's River of Arches," editorial, *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 25 August 1955, A-16.
27. Jack Valentine, "Nothing Serious" column, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 January 1955, 10.
28. Harlon Bement to Otis Marston, 27 January 1955, box 315, MC, emphases added. Colorado River history buff Otis Marston later wrote to Bement announcing he was "about ready to start a Klubb to work against the naming of anything DRY WASH BEAR CREEK DEER CREEK

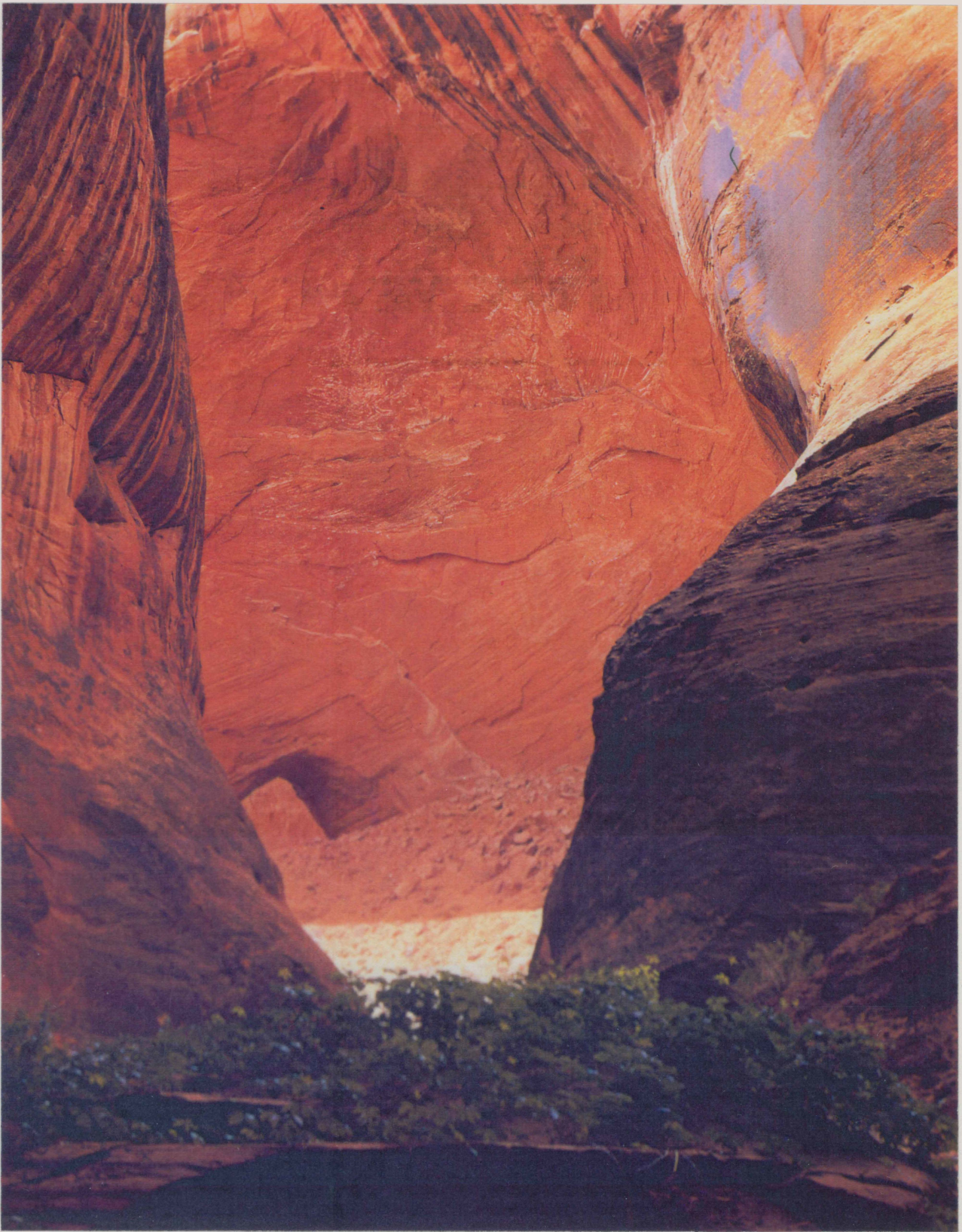
NAVAHO CREEK INDIAN CREEK BEAVER CREEK GREEN VALLEY COTTONWOOD CREEK MUDDY RIVER BALD MOUNTAIN and on and on." He was of the opinion that "we should do a little more thinking and come up with a better name." The choice of new names should be done in caution, however, "as we know damned well that some outfit will come along and want to name it Grosvenor Arch as they did Butler Arch." "Can I sell you a membership in the Klubb?" Marston asked Bement. The question may have been facetious, for the naming of Bement Arch was not unlike that of Grosvenor Arch. Evidently Bement did not see the parallel. He answered, "Sign me up in your Klubb." Marston to Bement, 17 February 1960; and Bement in reply, 1 March 1960, box 19, MC.

29. F.A. Barnes, *Canyon Country Arches and Bridges* (Moab: Canyon Country Publications, 1987), 176.

30. "The only possible credit I can have for myself," Moore continued, "is that I hiked and rode a pony for days down through there having a glorious and energetic trip." Moore to Otis Marston, 31 August 1955, box 315, MC. In a more lighthearted mood, Jack Breed similarly conceded that "I claim no first except that I have stood on the top of Rainbow Bridge, held the top of my left ear with my right hand and spit off the bridge. I am sure that is a first that the Geographic will want to record." Breed to Marston, 29 August 1949, box 22, MC. "The Geographic's editors, not I," Breed maintained, put in the statement "As far as we could learn, we were the first to find [Grosvenor Arch]." The editors, in turn, excused themselves by saying "We do everything possible to check our articles before publication. Frankly, this is very difficult to do when a story is on an area as little known as that covered in Breed's article." George Long to Marston, 30 September 1949, box 156, MC. To his credit, Breed noted at the end of his *National Geographic* article that "no one could claim discovery of any of these features. The Mormons have known about them for generations." The disclaimer seems insufficient, however, for the hyperbole preceding it.

31. D. Elden Beck to Otis Marston, 22 November 1955, box 315, MC. Beck's Coyote Gulch names were derived from prominent members of the Powell Survey: Dutton Arch, Thompson Bridge, Dellenbaugh Arch. See Beck, "Coyote Gulch," *The Improvement Era* 46 (August 1943): 462-63. Today these spans are known as Jacob Hamblin Arch, Coyote Natural Bridge, and Cliff Arch—names Robert Moore popularized in *National Geographic*. Moore coined the name Cliff Arch himself (though some locals referred to it as Jug Handle Arch); he took Coyote Natural Bridge and Jacob Hamblin Arch from limited local usage. "What really upsets me," Beck wrote about Moore's article, "is to have writers make such blank remarks as 'no one knows about these arches and bridges but cattlemen and a few persons in Escalante.'" Beck for one knew about the arches, and he felt left out. "All of the arches and bridges were first seen by our survey parties in 1938," he notified. "I had known of them for several years previous to this as I knew several people who had seen them. After the initial visit I inquired about local names for these structures. The main distinction was that people just called them for the most part 'the bridges.'" Beck to Leo A. Borah (intended for Robert Moore), 31 August 1955, Beck Collection (unprocessed), special collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

32. *Annual Message of the President to the Members, National Geographic Society*, October 1954, inside cover.
33. Jess Barker to Otis Marston, 28 November 1955, box 11, MC.
34. *Ken Sleight notes, Escalante River, Davis Canyon*, box 315, MC. Sleight, himself a one-time resident of Escalante, had "definite ideas on who has the authority to name." Pseudo-explorers from Washington, D.C. did not: "They come into our country - and name things at will - things that have been named previously." Explorer Canyon (a tributary of the lower Escalante) was another source of irritation. "It seems that a group of Explorer Scouts [from Salt Lake City] recently [1956] submitted this in favor of them selves. It was accepted. It has no reference locally to this canyon. Dreamed up out of mid-air. This is not the way. None of my maps or references will ever signify this name." Sleight to Otis Marston, 4 February 1963, box 210, MC.
35. Edson Alvey, *Place Names in the Escalante Area* (1982), copy of typescript in author's possession, emphasis added.
36. W.W. Dyar, "The Colossal Bridges of Utah," *Century Magazine* 68 (August 1904): 505-11, 506.
37. H.L.A. Culmer, "Who Shall Name Our Natural Bridges?" *Western Monthly* 11 (February 1910): 38-41.
38. *Ibid.*, 41.
39. Byron Cummings, "The Great Natural Bridges of Utah," *Bulletin of the University of Utah* 3 (November 1910), 12.
40. Aleson to Harold Bulger, 28 September 1959.
41. Barnes, *Canyon Country Arches and Bridges*, 176
42. Robert Vreeland, *Nature's Bridges and Arches*, vol. 6, "The Escalante River Basin" (self-published, 1977), 38.
43. W.L. Rusho to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, 5 February 1974, La Gorce Arch docket, U.S. Board on Geographic Names records, Reston, Virginia (hereafter BGN).
44. Superintendent Reynolds to the Board, 2 July 1974, BGN.
45. Glen Bean to (unidentified) Chief of Division of Natural Landmarks and Theme Studies, 6 August 1974, BGN.
46. Ruess to Waldo Ruess, 11 November 1934, in Rusho, *Everett Ruess: A Vagabond for Beauty*, 179-80.



La Gorce Arch, Davis Gulch, Utah (c. 1962), by Eliot Porter